

Wagner, NMFS/5 Nov 02

Comments on Fall / Winter update

Introduction

no comments

Chum Spawning Flows

The action agencies plan to start the chum spawning operation on November 5. The NMFS BiOp states that a chum operation will commence “If the best hydrologic data available by early October indicate that precipitation, runoff, and reservoir storage are likely to support the operation from the start of spawning (late October or early November) until the end of emergence...”. The climate forecast available in early October is highly uncertain, but indications are this will be an el nino year. This condition often results in lower precipitation in the Columbia River Basin. This is presently reflected in the early season forecast for Dworshak Reservoir. The October 2002 forecast for the North Fork Clearwater Basin is for below average runoff from that basin. This being the case, the Action Agencies propose starting the operation several days later than the November 1 start date specified in NMFS opinion for years when there is no perceived problem with initiating the operation. The action agencies also propose changing the November 1 start date to a planning date for future years, and making the start of the operation contingent on the presence of fish in the Ives Island Area. The process for making these changes to NMFS Biological Opinion is being developed.

Bonneville Corner Collector Construction

no comments

Burbot Spawning Flows

The action agencies have been working with the Kootenai Tribe, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and representatives from the Kootenai Valley to assess whether a burbot operation can be conducted this year. The burbot population which spawns in the Kootenai Valley is a candidate population for listing under the Endangered Species Act. An SOR has been submitted requesting an operation which is believed to be beneficial to the burbot in the near term and provide information on how the burbot respond to a controlled Libby discharge in the longer term. The degree of how this operation would effect current flood control practices, operations for other listed species, and power generation revenues is being evaluated. The degree of these impacts will determine the action agencies response to the SOR request.

Flood Control

Several notable issues regarding flood control will come into play this fall and winter. A decision on whether VARQ will be implemented at Libby Dam is scheduled to be made by December 31, 2002. Also a new forecasting tool has been developed for Libby Reservoir. This forecast tool utilizes SOI and current precipitation data to forecast flood control draft needs at the Libby project. It is anticipated this product will be used in conjunction with current forecast methods to determine flood control draft rates this season. Aside from these changes flood control will be operated in accordance with the Columbia River Treaty Flood Control Operating Plan.